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### **Book Review: Tradition and Reform: Thomas Bremer, Cross and Kremlin: A Brief History of the Orthodox Church in Russia**

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## Book Review: Tradition and Reform: Thomas Bremer, *Cross and Kremlin: A Brief History of the Orthodox Church in Russia*

In Russia, the Orthodox Church is far larger than in any other country, yet internationally it is poorly understood due to a lack of critical study and a tendency to isolation. Displaying deep understanding yet eschewing hagiography, Thomas Bremer here provides a much needed and absorbing account of the ROC's origins, mission, ecclesiology and shifting relationship with political powers. The ROC began as a Greek mission around the tenth century in Kiev, but in 1459, six years after the fall of Constantinople, declared autocephaly and repudiated the reunion with the Western Church, which the Council of Florence had recently enacted. In the aftermath of the Ottoman conquests, Russia was the last free Orthodox country, with the image of Moscow as the third Rome, as well as financial subventions to struggling Orthodox Churches elsewhere, leading in 1589 to its elevation to a patriarchate.

Bremer describes a pattern of monastic colonization in which hermits withdrew into forests, monasteries grew up around them, and land was cleared for settlements and agriculture, as well as important missions to Alaska and Japan. By the end of the fifteenth century, one third of Russia's vast territory was monastically owned. Spiritually, monasticism was respected, acting as a bulwark against new ritual practices and state interference. Monks, unlike most clergy in parishes—which were often handed down from father to son—were frequently well-educated, had a mystical sensibility and were more likely to command the respect of the intelligentsia. This continued even under the rule of Catherine the Great, whose suppression of the ROC, justified on Enlightenment principles, preceded its near annihilation under Lenin a century later.

Particularly striking is the coverage given to liberalizing influences within the ROC, supremely the council of 1917, at which laypeople were in the majority, new autonomy for parishes and their clergy was confirmed, and laypeople and clergy were given a voice in episcopal appointments. Yet the Bolshevik Revolution ended the possibility of reform just six months later, and the council's radical recommendations have never been implemented. How long it will take to review them remains to be seen. In the current, post-communist resurgence of the ROC, most of its adult members are converts predisposed to conservative defences of a purported purity. However, the council's centenary would be a fitting time to revisit its agenda.